

## 6. Elias and Emma Smeltzer Kessler

Elias Alvin Kessler was born on November 28, 1904 in Barry Township, located in Schuylkill county in east central Pennsylvania. His parents, Charles and Emma (Mattern) Kessler, were lifelong residents of the Deep Creek Valley. Elias was of German background, and represented the fourth generation of Kesslers in America:

Georg (wife Eva Dietrich)	Born around 1790
Elias (wife Catherine Diehl)	Born 9/2/1832, died 11/6/1903
Charles (wife Emma Mattern)	Born 1867, died 1940
Elias Alvin	Born 11/28/1904

All of the Kesslers lived, died, and were buried within a few miles of the church cemetery in modern day Weishample, Pennsylvania. According to family legend, the first Kessler came to Pennsylvania as an indentured servant.

Elias, or Eli (AY-lee) as he was known, was very close to his mother as he grew up in Deep Creek Valley. Eli also was called "Flatch", but the origins of this name are unknown. Eli was a good student, and was an eager participant in the classroom. He recollected that people recognized him as a good public speaker as early as his teen years, when he tried to rouse the local farmers into buying war bonds for World War I.

In Schuylkill county in the early 1900's, there were no highschools for Elias. As was customary, Elias left school in his early teens to go to work in the mines, with a plan to earn enough money to start a farm. He also assisted his father Charles in a poultry venture. His father borrowed heavily on his farmland to fund the venture, which failed just as the country was entering into the depths of the Great Depression. To satisfy the bank, Elias' father had to sell all but the land around the main farmhouse.

Emma Smeltzer was born on September 26, 1909. She was the first child born to Elizabeth Jane Smeltzer, who was twenty when Emma was born. Emma was born out of wedlock, and Elizabeth bristled whenever she had to speak of Emma's father. The stigma of illegitimacy was a strong influence on Emma's (and later Elias') life. The father's name was not on Emma's birth certificate (although that would have been customary), and he reportedly lived in a city in nearby Northumberland county.



*Young Emma Smeltzer*